

Castlemaine Naturalist

June 2018

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Superb Fairy Wren – photo by Joy Weatherill

SEANA in Healesville

Field Naturalists from many Victorian FNCs met at Badger Creek, near Healesville, on Friday 27th April for the Autumn 2018 SEANA (South East Australia Naturalists Association) weekend Get-together, hosted by FNC Victoria. Castlemaine FNC was represented by Geraldine and Geoff Harris, and Rosemary and Peter Turner. The first activity was a brilliant talk at the Badger Creek Hall by Alex Maisey, on “Conservation of the Superb Lyrebird on the Melbourne Fringe”; Alex has been enthralled by lyrebirds since he was a boy – to the extent that he persuaded his parents to home school him so he had more time to study lyrebirds! He is now researching aspects of their lives for a PhD. There are now about 200 lyrebirds in Sherbrook Forest.

Seven excursions had been arranged for Saturday, the main one, with 50 attendees, a behind-the-scenes tour of Healesville Sanctuary with Rupert Baker, General Manager, Life Science. This was a fascinating morning, learning about the sanctuary’s hospital, the work on threatened species, and a glimpse at the complexities of ensuring each animal gets the right food. The developments at the sanctuary over recent decades are very impressive. Those of us on the afternoon excursion from Maroondah Dam to Donnelly’s Weir saw a good number of birds, highlighted by seeing two Powerful Owls high in a Cyprus – too hidden for useful photos. There are still some towering mountain ash along this walk.

After the SEANA AGM and General Meeting at 5pm on Saturday, the group took over a local restaurant for dinner and much talk, followed by Rupert Baker’s fascinating presentation on the role of zoos in conservation. The sanctuary is fortunate to have such an enthusiastic expert who is also an excellent science communicator.

Another six excursions were offered on Sunday, some repeats. Local

ecologist Marty White led a group to sites around Dixon's and Chum Creeks, to view the impacts of the 2009 fires. He told us that when everything was burnt, he undertook to record the effects of the fires as a means to feel useful – his early photos revealed the devastation. Some hillsides were so hot that soil seeds were killed, so there is still little undergrowth below the regenerating trees and dead trunks. Others have done better, but the richest diversity we saw was in an unburnt area. Geoff Lay led an excursion to the O'Shannessys Aquaduct trail and the



Cement Creek Rainforest Gallery. The disused aquaduct was completed in 1914 to take water 82 km from O'Shannessy reservoir to Silvan Dam to meet Melbourne's expanding needs.

A stimulating weekend, catching up with friends from other FNCs and making new contacts. - very useful as we start planning for the Spring 2019 gathering here in Castlemaine. **Please note the dates, 4th – 7th October 2019.**

- Peter Turner and Geraldine Harris

1. Very tall tree on walk from Maroondah Dam to Donnellys Weir
2. Rosemary, Geoff and others watching Powerful Owls
3. Regrowth after the 2009 fires – minimal understory
4. The O'Shannessy Aquaduct – a massive timber structure
5. Burgundy Wood Tubaria at Cement Creek Rainforest Gallery



Notes and Specimens from Wildlife magazine

George Broadway

The following are the specimens sent in to Crosbie Morrison, Editor of "Wildlife" magazine in June 1948. They appeared in a column titled "Notes and Specimens from Readers". I was under the impression that readers often sent in specimens which been recently described, which made me wonder whether they had read previous editions carefully. This month there are a few such, but in fact the number of different specimens sent has grown considerably since I started writing this column.

Insects

Gordon (NSW): The size of the "Bulldog" ant nest will depend on the size and age of the colony. The Vic. Dept. of Agriculture recommends sodium arsenite (not "ate") mixed with honey.

Flemington: Green Vegetable Bug, *Nezara viridula*. An unwanted import which plays havoc with bean and tomato crops. Good garden hygiene is essential. See Jan'17 NL

Kingsville: Green Vegetable Bugs again, juvenile. Also Black Cockchafer beetle whose grubs feed underground on roots.

Stawell: Larva of Orange Butterfly (Dingy Swallowtail), *Papilio anactus*, whose natural food is the leaves of orange and lemon trees.

Summer Hill (NSW): Another Orange Butterfly.

Caulfield: Fidler Beetle. One of the flower chafer beetles which feed chiefly on flowers but also on leaves of a variety of plants. The name comes from the yellow (sometimes green) markings which resemble the shape of of a violin.

Traralgon: Grey Gum Ghost Moth, one of the family *Hepialidae* whose larvae bore into the wood of trees. The moths usually emerge on drizzly nights. See April '18 NL

Bendigo: Caterpillar of the Vine Hawk Moth. See Aug '17. A pest on grape and ornamental vines.

Toorak: Ichneumon Wasp. See Mar'18. Readily recognised by the bristle-like egg-placer at the end of the abdomen. Useful insect because it uses the egg-placer to lay eggs inside the bodies of caterpillars. The larval wasps then consume the caterpillar.

Canterbury: Not possible to identify from empty cocoon and pupa case, your moth had flown.

Brunswick: Long-faced Grasshopper. See last issue. Fairly common but does not congregate in swarms as plague grasshoppers and locusts do. Feeds on many kinds of vegetation.

Coburg: Vine Hawk Moth caterpillar again. See Feb NL. The spine on the tail is not a sting.

Woodend: Wingless female of the soldier-fly known as *Boreoides subulatus*, which has no common name. Commonly found in mountain districts. Lays her eggs in a hole in wood but it is not certain whether she makes the hole or uses one which is already there. Apparently the larvae feed on decaying wood.

Roseville (NSW): Chrysalis of the common Australian Crow Butterfly. See May NL
Elsternwick: Chirping noise in trees at dusk probably the Gumleaf Grasshopper (Katydid) *Caedicia olivacea* See Oct'16. A tiny frog, *Crinia* also has a high-pitched whistling note and calls at dusk.

Spiders

Haberfield (NSW): Tailed spider, *Arachnura higginsii*. Small species, fairly common in temperate Australia. Builds irregular webs with little brown spindle-shaped egg sacs. Harmless.

Bellerive (Tas): Tailed Spider

Box Hill: Spiny Spider, *Gasteracantha minax*. See October '16. Sociable little chap who lives in colonies. Harmless.

Chapple Vale: Another Spiny Spider.

Burwood: Orchard Spider *Celaenia excavata*. Aug '17

Rankins Springs (NSW): Red-headed Trapdoor Spider, found in the Murray Basin. This is the male, the female is the much larger Black Trapdoor Spider. Not known to be harmful. See Feb'18.

Botanical

Blackburn: Stinkhorn. Probably an *Anthurus* although it was too far gone to be sure. Members of the group are very beautiful with brilliant red and pink coloration, but they have the odour of bad meat, probably to attract the flies which carry the spores.

Bunyip: Another Stinkhorn but different from the previous specimen. This one is *Aseroe rubra*. See Bruce Fuhrer, "A Field Guide to Australian Fungi" Page 228.

Clematis: Puffballs - a common autumn fungus. Apparently being eaten by bandicoots which are almost exclusively insectivorous. However the colour and consistency of the immature fungus might fool the bandicoot into thinking it was some kind of grub.

General

Staffordshire Reef: Rabbit skull, the owner had broken the lower jaw so that the lower front teeth then failed to meet the upper incisors, so that all four teeth continued to grow in an arc instead of being worn down by the opposing teeth. The rabbit would have lived by eating through the sides of the mouth.

Richmond: Small Marbled Gecko, one of the soft-bodied lizards. They do not usually live so far south but may be brought in a load of firewood.

Elmhurst: Tail which once belonged to a little sugar glider. The normal tail pattern is soft grey with the last quarter grey to black with sometimes a white tuft at the extreme tip. A nocturnal animal living in tree hollows, but which often falls prey to cats.

Liverpool (NSW): Baby Brown Snake. This one had about 70 black bars on the light brown background colour. Often the black bars are confined to the head; they all disappear before adulthood is reached.

Oatley (NSW): Your lizard was the W.A. Bicycle Lizard, a type generally found in dry inland areas. My Google search suggested that it may be also known as the Ring-tailed Dragon, *Ctenophrys caudicinctus*.

Mystic Park: Gastroliths or stomach stones of the yabby or Murray Crayfish. Often found inside fishes or in the droppings of cormorants since both consume yabbies. They are always formed in pairs, one pair to each yabby.

Fitzroy: Johnny Hairy-legs the House Centipede or *Scutigera sp.* A useful addition to the household as it is a persistent enemy of Silverfish and other insects. See Feb' 17

Brighton: A baby Pipe-fish, relative of the Sea-horses. Inhabits weedy beds in the shallow sea. Seldom grows to more than 20 cm.

Frankston: Probably one of the many colour variations of the Tiger Snake. Your eagle was almost certainly a Wedge-tail intent on reducing the rabbit population.

Bruthen: Probably a Water Dragon. Try it with a pool of water.



Marbled Gecko, Mt. Tarrengower



Water Dragon, Canberra Botanical Gardens

Autumn On The Bellarine Peninsula

Joy Weatherill

A pair of Black Kites can often be seen in the Curlewis area; and a good spot for some bush birds is along the Rail Trail which can be accessed from various points.

On the 2nd May we saw a young Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, several Spotted Pardalotes, Fairy Wrens, Brown Thornbills, and a very neat Magpie-lark nest.

Lake Victoria has been extremely low because of our lack of rain. However, on the 29th April and 1st May, there were many birds to be found. It is obviously the Duck Season. There were roughly 4000 Chestnut Teal - carrying a scope over my shoulder was not a good idea! About 1000 Black Swans, more Red-capped Plover than I have ever seen before - running everywhere. I made a rough count of 50. Two Masked Lapwings standing guard. Thirteen Red-necked Avocets flew in. There were about 40 Curlew Sandpipers - one in breeding plumage, and about 20 Red-necked Stints. Also a raft of a dozen Hoary-headed Grebes, and one Hooded Plover.



Above: Hooded Plover



Curlew Sandpiper in breeding plumage

Below: Red-capped Plover

Red-necked Avocets



The Red-capped Plovers were making the most of the exposed sand - for feeding, and also using the depressions left in the sand for hunkering down at night or in windy weather. Each depression revealed lots of little footprints.



The native vegetation, both at Lake Victoria, and on the 2nd May at Point Henry, had lovely rich Autumn colours - like the Beaded Glasswort *Sarcocornia quinqueflora* - a perennial succulent halophytic coastal shrub which occurs in coastal areas that flood and which is well adapted to coping with high salt levels. It grows to a metre in height but often forms more of a ground cover. This is the type of country that an Orange-bellied Parrot would prefer.



The Autumn colours of Samphire or Beaded Glasswort

Salt encrusted bonsai-like wind blown vegetation around the edge of Lake Victoria

At the Moolap Salt Works area on the 2nd May - Ponds along the Point Henry Road had several Black-winged (Pied) Stilts, some Red-necked Stilts with a touch of red on their necks; and in this area and down to the Point, including the area around the Alcoa Frog Lake, an abundance of raptors - one Little Eagle, a Spotted Harrier, a Black-shouldered Kite and two Swamp Harriers.

Black-winged Stilt

Red-necked Stint





Lake Victoria

Moolap salt works



Frog Lake – Alcoa, Point Henry.
Looking towards the You Yangs

Stoney Creek Lake Reserve - Trentham

Joy Weatherill

A spring in the south west corner of this reserve keeps the water at a good level at the lake in Quarry Street Trentham

During our picnic lunch we were provided with a constantly changing spectacle of bird activity. Ten species in all.

The most entertaining were probably the Cormorants - 9 Little Black and 10 Little Pied - which kept in two distinct groups, sometimes swimming, sometimes resting in the tall Eucalypts, and also flying in circles directly above the lake. The graceful Intermediate(?) Egret spent some time along the west edge among the reeds, and then flew low over the water to the trees at the opposite end - and repeated this several times - a perfect reflection in the lake.

There were a couple of Eastern Black Duck and 4 Eurasian Coots. 8 Wood Duck spent some time on the grassy bank and some time cooling off in the

water. 2 Sulphur Crested Cockatoos screeched past and several Corellas flew over.

One Purple Swamp Hen popped briefly out from the reeds, and 3 White Ibis spent time roosting and time hunting on the bank.

The Falls at Trentham are another great place to visit. These are Victoria's highest single-drop waterfall. Formed some 5 million years ago by molten lava rapidly cooling as it flowed along the old Coliban River valley. Trentham Falls plunge 32 metres.



Bird Quiz

Nigel Harland

The bird featured last month was the Yellow-rumped Thornbill. I know this is two Thornbills in a row, but I promise there won't be any more! The yellow-rumped is much more easily identified by its brightly yellow coloured rump and the spots on top of the head. The only possible thornbill which could be confused with it is the Buff-rumped, which lacks the spots on the head and the yellow in the rump is much less noticeable.



The bird for this month is shown at right -

Observations

Reported at General Meeting on 11/5/18:

Marli Wallace: Seen in Castlemaine Botanic Gardens – 6 Little Pied Cormorants, Nankeen Night Heron, 2 Lapwings, Willie Wagtail.

Sylvia Phillips: Yellow-tufted Honeyeater at Diamond Gully Rd

Geoff Harris: recorded on motion sensitive camera – Tuan in house. Geoff has been trying to catch rats in a non-lethal cage trap. This led to several contributions about problems with maggot-infested dead rats, and rat skeletons found in hidden spots!

Rosemary and Peter Turner: 30 U3A Bird Watchers recorded total of 34 species in Botanic Gardens on May 8th, including Nankeen Night Heron, 1 Powerful Owl, Willie Wagtail, 1 Little Pied Cormorant, Yellow-faced Honeyeater and several thornbill species - but resident Lapwings absent.

Later reports:

Marli Wallace: TWO Powerful Owls very high in the Stone Pine on 17/5/18, later confirmed by Peter Turner with photograph. Has last year's lone adult found a new mate? Only 1 seen on 18/5/18 and 21/5/18, very well hidden.

Richard Piesse's observations:

In bush south of Poverty Gully Channel east of Fryers Rd on 14/5/18: *Pterostylis rebescens* - Red-tipped Inland Greenhood.

Along White Gum Track: *Eucalyptus gonicalyx* and *Euc. dives* in flower. (Latter's flowering period is normally September and October.) *Acacia genistifolia* and *Cassinia aculeata* also in flower.

At Vaughan Springs Reserve on 17/5/18: Large number of Superb Fairy-wrens (juveniles).

Birds of Sutton Grange June 2018

Nigel Harland

Despite the advent of winter, the list doesn't seem to get any smaller.

Superb Fairy Wren	Welcome Swallow
Eurasian Blackbird	Galah
New Holland Honeyeater	Willie Wagtail
Australian Magpie	Red-browed Finch
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
White-browed Scrubwren	Long-billed Corella
Eastern Spinebill	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
White-winged Chough	White-naped Honeyeater
Red Wattlebird	Brown-headed Honeyeater
Crimson Rosella	Grey Currawong
Tree Martin	Laughing Kookaburra



Our speaker for June will be John Walter

John writes -

I began actively researching local flora after I moved to Drummond in 2001 and made the jump to fungi in 2010 and jumped again to include the bryophytes in 2012.

I joined **Wombat Forestcare** in 2011 and started writing for their newsletter almost immediately with 36 articles covering a wide range of flora and fungi topics in the years since.

I have just completed a 12 month study of local moths, using my veranda lights to attract species to the walls for photography and identification and have over 350 species named and another 100 still in the identification process.

I am active in **Landcare** and work full time in the building industry, currently managing projects at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, Auckland Convention Centre and Christchurch Convention Centre.

I have an extensive library and will bring some of my collection of fungi books with me for members to examine. I would also like to demonstrate some of the web based resources available for people to use.

FungiMap has a focus on some rare or rarely seen species and I have been fortunate enough to make some very interesting fungal finds so they will form a key part of the presentation and I will also show some of the incredible fungal diversity to be seen in our region.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists

Coming events

Fri June 8 meeting: speaker JOHN WALTER on Fungi

Sat June 9 field trip: Blackwood ?

Fri July 13 meeting: speaker TANYA LOOS of Connecting Country

Sat July 14 field trip: a Connecting Country project

Fri August 10 meeting: speaker DAMIEN COOK on wetlands renewal

Sat August 11 field trip: a local wetland area with Damien Cook

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2018

Ordinary membership: Single \$35, Family \$50

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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